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ABSTRACT

A study examined the influence of professional etiquette, procedural factors, demographic factors, and child eligibility code factors on parent satisfaction with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Surveys and interviews were conducted with 207 parents in the Southwest border region whose children had been evaluated for special education services and who had attended an IEP meeting. Results indicate that each of the four independent variables influenced satisfaction with IEP meetings. Direct positive relationships existed when professional etiquette and procedural factors were examined as sole indicators of satisfaction. Three features of parent and child demographics demonstrated inverse relationships to satisfaction. Those were family income, parent education, and male participant attending with spouse/partner. With regard to student eligibility codes, less satisfaction was reported for meetings held for children with physical or health impairments. When viewed as part of an interaction, all four independent variables revealed significance. Either in first-level or second-level interactions, demographic features, annual family income, and parent education showed interaction with etiquette and procedural factors. Ethnicity had no effect on satisfaction scores. The eligibility code of physical or health impairments continued to be significant when combined with other independent variables. Recommendations include training professionals and parents regarding special education and IEPs; simplifying educational jargon; following through with IEP provisions; having appropriate personnel present at IEP meetings; and ensuring the environment is conducive to decision making. (Contains 29 references). (TD)

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A LOOK AT VARIABLES AFFECTING PARENT SATISFACTION WITH IEP MEETINGS

Attending an Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting can present opportunities for participation in productive decision-making, and barriers that may impede that very same decision-making process (Harry, 1992a, 1992b, 1992c). For this reason, educators need strategies that create parent-friendly environments for good decision-making within IEP meetings. The U.S. Supreme Court decisions in Brown v. Topeka, Kansas, Board of Education (1954), Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (1971), and Mills v. District of Columbia (1972) served as catalysts for further legislation affirming rights to education for children with special educational needs (Hardman, Drew, Egan, & Wolf, 1990).

Parental satisfaction with education for children with special needs has been a topic of inquiry since before Public Law 94-142 in 1975 (Smith & Luckasson, 1995). IDEA of 1997, Pubic Law 105-17, mandates public education to actively involve parent participation in IEP decision-making meetings (Act to Amend the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, to reauthorize and make Improvements to the Act, and for other purposes (IDEA of 1997)).

Prior research focusing on parent satisfaction with the decision-making processes in IEP meetings identified a variety of concerns. Parents want to be provided information on what their children are expected to learn (Dembinski & Mauser (1977). Parents hold certain expectations for the outcome of IEP meetings and for participation opportunities (Harry, Allen, & McLaughlin, 1995). Parent understanding of the importance of activities in IEP meetings can be influenced by perceived effectiveness of the process (Rutherford & Billig, 1995). Empowerment of parents provides a positive connection in the decision-making processes (Turner, 1996). However, no single study has investigated the relationship of multiple variables as they relate to parent satisfaction with IEP meetings.

Seven questions were developed to investigate potential relationships between the four variables and parent satisfaction.

1. How does professional etiquette relate to parent satisfaction?
2. Which factors of professional etiquette are most related to parent satisfaction?
3. How do procedurals relate to parent satisfaction?
4. Which factors of procedurals are most related to parent satisfaction?
5. How do parent and student demographic characteristics relate to parent satisfaction?
6. How do child eligibility codes relate to parent satisfaction?
7. Are there interactions among professional etiquette, procedurals, demographic factors, or child eligibility code factors in their relationship to parent satisfaction?

Methods

A cluster, convenience-sampling procedure was implemented to identify participants (Vierra & Pollock, 1988). This sampling model was selected because participation was restricted to parents of students who have been evaluated for special education services and who have gone to an IEP meeting.

Participants

The original participants were to be from 20 schools of an urban southwestern, multicultural border school district participated. As the study progressed, sampling was expanded to include a larger population in the contiguous southwest region. The expanded sampling included persons from advocacy groups and eligible parents enrolled in special education courses at New Mexico State University. The expanded sample resulted in 71 more returned surveys toward the final 207 total returned usable surveys.

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Instrumentation and Procedures

Design

Two research design formats were used to answer the seven research questions. The first format was a descriptive research design using single group. The second format used voluntary interviews from which were developed grounded theory (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Quantitative Component

The quantitative component used a one-group non-treatment type survey measure (Borg et al., 1993; Vierra, & Pollock, 1988). Responses were analyzed as descriptive research (Borg et al., 1993).

A structured survey was developed to gather quantitative information (Dillman, 1978; Borg, Gall, & Gall, 1993). Survey items required dichotomous responses, classification responses, and Likert-type responses. A separate detached form provided space for comments and opportunity to volunteer to be personally interviewed.

The survey was developed and written in two languages. This provided comparability between the responses of English and Spanish language preference respondents. Cultural aspects and idiomatic phrases were considered in developing both survey forms. Words and terms do not always translate accurately from one language to another (Harry, 1992b). Certain social graces required in one culture might not hold the equal degree of importance in another (Lian & Aloia, 1994). For those reasons, verbatim translation of the English survey was challenging and ultimately, not appropriate in a few instances.

A representative non-literate group of both English and Spanish speaking parents were sought as volunteers for oral administration of the survey. A script was given to campus designated persons for distributing surveys.

Qualitative Component

The qualitative component, interviewing (Rubin & Babbie, 1997), used semistructured interviews. These interviews were conducted as extensions of the written survey (Bogdan, & Biklen, 1992). An interpreter assisted the researcher during interviews with respondents who spoke only Spanish. The survey response number was 207 with 24 interviews conducted. This was an 11.6% interview rate to the response number.

Description of Variables

Each of the four independent variables were investigated in prior research only singularly or with a secondary emphasis on their relationships (Harry, 1992a, 1992b; Tafoya, 1999). Prior studies investigated educator and parent relationships of variables, without regard to interaction between them or to parent satisfaction with IEP meetings.

The four independent variables provided distinct groups of information based on perceptions of the respondents. The first variable, etiquette, encompassed communication activities and provision for physical comfort of parents in meeting settings (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989; Council for Exceptional Children, 1991; Goldstein, Strickland, Turnbull, & Curry, 1980; Harry, 1992b, 1992c; Turnbull & Ruef, 1997). The second variable, procedurals, was a set of items associated with documenting behaviors and those parental legal rights identified by IDEA. The third set of variables, demographics, were identified by respondents (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989; Harry, 1992a, 1992b, 1992c; Trivette, Dunst, Boyd, & Hamby, 1995). The fourth variable, student eligibility codes, was a set of 11 mandated special education disabilities or "student eligibility codes" (IDEA of 1997, 20 U.S.C. 1400 et al., §602(3)(A)), of two combined impairment conditions (Deaf-Blind and Multiple Disabilities), and of two additional coding responses, "Don't know" and "Not eligible".

The dependent variable is parent satisfaction. Satisfaction is important in providing an atmosphere conducive to decision-making for children with special needs (Baca & Cervantes, 1989; Baumgartner, Bryan, Donahue, & Nelson, 1993; Bellew Family personal internet communication February 26, 1997; Björck-Åkesson &

Granlund, 1995; Coleman, 1991; Cooper & Rascon, 1994: Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Harry, 1992a, 1992b, 1992c; Lian & Aloia, 1994).

Results

Data Analysis

Data analysis of the five sets of variables quantified each survey item response. The first dependent variable, parent satisfaction, is composed of six separate items with scores potentially ranging from 0 to 11. The rest of the variables were independent variables. Professional etiquette had 12 items with scores ranging from 0 to 12. Procedurals had 33 items with scores ranging from 0 to 33. Parent and child demographics had ten items, which identified mutually exclusive classifications. Student eligibility codes identified students as having one or more eligibility for special education service.

Tools used in data analysis were regression, t-test, and analysis of variance (ANOVA) of responses to the survey and thematic analysis of interviews. Descriptions of the variables, statistical tools, and statistical significance, components of the quantitative methodology, are presented in Table 1. Components of qualitative methodology are presented in Tables 2 and 3, which identify the ranked themes and their associated mean satisfaction scores. satisfaction scores range from 1 to 5, with 1 meaning Very Dissatisfied and 5 being Very Satisfied.

Results of thematic analysis of interviews identified positive relationships with satisfaction. Respondents identified the presence of communication in meetings most frequently. IEP implementation was the second most frequently reported theme of concern identified in interviews. Respect for parents was the third most frequently reported theme of concern identified in interviews. The fourth most frequently reported theme was parent involvement. The fifth most frequently reported theme was comfort. The final most frequently reported theme was staff presence. Results of thematic analysis identified respondents were mostly satisfied with IEP meetings.

Answers to Research Questions

Answers to the seven research questions are revealed by analysis of written reports by 207 individuals and oral interview reports on 26 IEP meetings. Analyses indicate participants are generally satisfied with the meetings. Quantitative data identifies 5% of the outliers in the "Dissatisfying" group. Qualitative analysis identifies 12% of the respondents rate IEP meetings as Dissatisfying. Interpretation of significance of these results must consider the small number involved in both methodological procedures.

Analyses of descriptive statistics and grounded theory identify: (a) participants whose children have Physical/Health Impairments are generally least satisfied, (b) a strong relationship appears between communication and satisfaction, and (c) absence of proper personnel leads to dissatisfaction with IEP meetings.

Results of statistical analyses reveal two sets of variables as they relate to satisfaction. The first set of variables is singleton variables. The second set of variables involves interaction of variables as they relate to satisfaction.

When viewed as a sole indicator of parent satisfaction with IEP meetings, each variable has impact on satisfaction. Each of the four independent variables influence satisfaction with iEP meetings. Direct positive relationships exist when professional etiquette and procedurals are examined as sole indicators of satisfaction. Three features of Parent and Child Demographics demonstrate inverse relationships to satisfaction. Those three demographic features are Family Income, Parent Education, and Male participant attending with spouse/partner. Of the fourth variable, student eligibility codes, less satisfaction is reported for meetings held for children with Physical/Health Impairments.

When viewed as part of an interaction, all four independent variables reveal types of significance. Either in first level or second level interactions, Demographic features, Annual Family Income and Parent Education, show interaction with etiquette and procedurals. Ethnicity, when viewed for interaction, demonstrates no significance in change of satisfaction scores. The Eligibility Code variable of Physical/Health Impairments continues to reveal significance when combined in interaction with the other independent variables. Possible reasons for lesser

satisfaction by parents of students with Physical/Health Impairments may be due to differences in perceived needs of the child held by parents and school staff. These needs may focus more on health/medical services (i.e. chemical intervention; intubation; feeding a student through a gastrointestinal tube; cleaning of a stoma; physical therapy for ambulation, bathroom transfers, or upper body strengthening) than standard academic practices (i.e. reading, writing, mathematics, social studies, science, physical education, arts). Although it is understood that services to students with eligibility for special education must be educationally relevant, such judgments are often interpreted differently by members of IEP Teams.

Recommendations

There must be training for professionals and parents to follow through with agreements made in the IEP meeting and on the IEP plan. The IEP is a legal document, which parents report that some professional personnel do not respond to as being legally binding.

Professionals must offer explanations to parents who are not comfortable with "educationalese," offering information in terminology appropriate to demystify activities of IEP meetings.

Currently, child advocacy organizations and educational institutions present training and information on special education and the IEP meeting. This is available locally and through the internet. Efforts must continue to train professionals and parents concerning special education and the IEP meeting.

Administrators must secure follow-through of IEP plan in the areas of modifications, services, and equipment.

Administrators must provide and display competent administrative participation in IEP meetings.

For every IEP meeting, Administrators must require three conditions are present for all IEP meetings. The first, appropriate personnel are present. The second condition, teachers' classes are covered so that they may attend IEP meetings to participate in salient decision-making to take place. The third, the environment, both physical and emotional, must be reasonably comfortable and conducive to decision-making. Specific training on the importance of the above-identified areas is advocated.

Future research may examine relationships between satisfaction and prior experience with IEP meetings. Parents who have had prior experience with IEP meetings may have different satisfaction levels than those who have attended meetings in the past.

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Table 1
Variables, Statistical Tools, and Relationships with Parent Satisfaction

Hypothesis	Variables	Tool	Significance
1	Professional Etiquette	Regression	Positive relationship with satisfaction
2	Procedurals	Regression	Positive relationship with satisfaction
3	Comparison of female to male participants	t-test	No evidence that these populations are from different populations.
4	Comparison of females attending with their spouse to those attending singularly	t-test	No significant difference in satisfaction.
5	Comparison of males attending with their spouse to those attending singularly	t-test	Difference in satisfaction detected for males without spouses present. They were more satisfied.
6	Comparison of parents of male students to parents of female students.	t-test	No significant difference in satisfaction
7	Comparison of ethnic groups.	t-test	No significant difference in satisfaction.
8	Comparison of language preference groups	ANOVA	No significant difference in satisfaction
9	Comparison of grade levels	ANOVA	No significant difference in satisfaction.
10	Family Income	ANOVA	Negative relationship between Family Income and satisfaction.
11	Parent Education	ANOVA	No relationship between Parent Education and satisfaction.
12	Student Eligibility Codes	ANOVA	Relationship between student eligibility codes and satisfaction.
13	Interaction between professional etiquette and Parent and Student Demographic	ANOVA	Interaction
14	Interaction between professional etiquette and Family Income	ANOVA	Interaction
15	Interaction between professional etiquette and Parent Ethnicity	Regression	No interaction
16	Interaction between professional etiquette and Parent Gender	Regression	No interaction
17	Interaction between professional etiquette and Spouse/Partner Present	Regression	No interaction
18	Interaction between professional etiquette and Parent Education	Regression	Interaction
19	Interaction between professional etiquette and student eligibility codes	Regression	Interaction
20	Interaction between (a) procedurals and Parent and Student Demographic	ANOVA	Interaction
21	Interaction between procedurals and Family Income	Regression	Interaction
22	Interaction between procedurals and Parent Ethnicity	Regression	No interaction

Table 1 (Continued)

23	Interaction between procedurals and Parent Gender	Regression	No interaction
24	Interaction between (a) procedurals and (b) Spouse/Partner Present	Regression	No interaction
25	Interaction between procedurals and Parent Education	Regression	Interaction
26	Interaction between procedurals and student eligibility codes	Regression	Interaction
27	Interaction between Professional Etiquette, Family Income, and (c) Parent Ethnicity	Regression	Interaction
28	Interaction between procedurals, Family Income, and Parent Ethnicity	Regression	Interaction
29	Interaction between professional Etiquette, Parent Education, and student eligibility codes	Regression	Interaction
30	Interaction between procedurals, Parent Education, and student eligibility codes	Regression	Interaction

Table 2
Ranking by Frequency of Coded Themes, Etiquette, and Procedurals for Relationships of Reported Meetings

Number of Rank	Frequency	Theme	Meetings Present	Meetings Lacking
1.	23	Communication (E/P)	16	7
2.	13	IEP Implementation (P)	5	8
3.	12	Respect for Parent (E)	8	4
4.	10	Parent Involvement (P)	5	4
5.	7	Comfort (E)	3	4
6.	6	Staff Presence (P)	3	3

Note: E= Professional Etiquette component. P = Procedurals component.

Table 3
Mean Satisfaction Score Response Rate for Coded Themes

Theme	Present in Meeting Mean	Lacking in Meeting Mean
Communication (E/P)	4.6	2.9
IEP Implementation (P)	4.2	3.4
Respect for Parent (E)	4.5	2.5
Parent Involvement (P)	4.4	2.0
Staff Presence (P)	5.0	1.5
Comfort (E)	5.0	2.7

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